

Testimony

To: U.S. Senate Committee on Indian Affairs

S. 1658

May 17, 2000

Mr. Chairman, thank you for the privilege of testifying before you on a project that has been long time in planning. The Wakpa Sica Historical Society has envisioned this approach more than a dozen years and finally, ten years ago officially adopted as a project to bring Indian people and non-Indian neighbors together in a working relationship.

I would like to introduce myself so you know where I am coming from. I am an enrolled member, a full-blood of the Rosebud Sioux Tribe. I was born in Mellette County. Since my parents didn't have a car, I was born at home. My paternal grandmother was the midwife, who introduced me to this earth and named me Leading White Buffalo. I spoke only Lakota until I went to school when I was seven years old.

I am a product of government day school and boarding schools. I went to a public school the first two years of high school. I was fortunate to get an athletic scholarship the last three years of college. I learned to run long distances by running away from Rosebud Boarding School twice. I finally stayed because my grandmother talked to me about continuing school so that I could talk for them and protect them. I spent 19 years of my life going to school.

I am proud to say that I served my country during the Korean Conflict, like many other Sioux warriors. I worked as a full time Episcopal Priest for 12 years in South Dakota. I was Chairman of the Rosebud Sioux Tribe for six years. I taught at the University of South Dakota for two years and worked for Indian Health Service for fourteen years. I did retire for three years and then came back to work for the State of South Dakota as Commissioner of Tribal Government Relations for Governor Janklow, since 1997.

Recently, I became a member of the Wakpa Sica Historical Society because I support any efforts to bring people together in a working relationship. This group is attempting to do this by creating a place in a friendly, non-confrontational atmosphere, where there is involvement and exchange of ideas and proposed actions.

The Sioux people believe that Great Spirit God afforded them a certain area on grandmother earth where they may live with all their relatives in harmony and peace. Whenever part of them be it their remains or anything of value and meaning is left behind or taken away, it must be returned to a place of refuge where it is safe from other area of place, because it is not a part of that place/people. Therefore, I believe fully in repatriation that must be done. Some of the Sioux Tribes have already started. However, there are items that cannot be tribal specific, and therefore, must be kept in a place designated by the Sioux Tribes.

During my tenure (six years) as the Chairman of the Rosebud Sioux Tribe, the council and I were busy developing the economic base by bringing small industry to our reservation. We expanded our electronics plant from twenty employees to ninety-eight employees. At the time we were producing cable harnesses and printed circuits. We established a furniture factory by joint venturing with a St. Louis, Missouri firm. We had three shifts of eighty people. We expanded a pottery plant of some twenty employees. Our welding shop had sixteen. A picture reproduction plant had ten people.

To be successful we hired outside expertise when needed. We established boards to oversee the training and hiring of people. We insulated the administration of our plants from the tribal council. All of the above was commendable except we were so busy we didn't establish the commercial codes to stabilize our economy. The next administration replaced even the managers and fired many supervisors.

Part of the problem of economic development on the reservation is an unstable government infrastructure. Most of our tribes in South Dakota do not have separation of powers in their government. The Bureau of Indian Affairs when it proposed a model constitution for consideration to the IRA Tribes, gave authority to the tribal councils to oversee tribal administration and the judicial systems as well.

I am in favor of development of a tribal Supreme Court that will research and develop model codes that are cognizant of tribal culture and practice of resolving disputes, creating a peaceful environment in Indian societies.

Our Sioux society traditionally was intent on helping peace and creating a harmonious atmosphere. Restitution was a key factor in righting a wrongdoing. For any injury there is a solution for healing. Injured and injuries were brought together by elders to cause understanding and how to remedy the situation. In the most serious infractions like murder, of course, punishment would be considered.

Today in our court systems where we bring people together to fight there is no winner. Both sides lose because of hurt feelings that sometimes are never forgotten. Today the message we give is if you have money you can protect yourself and even take advantage of others. At least if you are related to a councilperson or better yet the Chairperson you have a chance in court. If the council or Chairman cannot influence the decision there is always the chance to get the judge fired by the council since he was hired by the council.

I believe the Supreme Court and its program, research and education can encourage separation of powers, or devise a way in which the court/judicial system can be independent and impartial. I would hope to see the issue of sovereignty is addressed in the future so that industries and investors will be assured of a fair settlement should there be misunderstandings. Investors need to be assured that their investment is protected from personal and political decisions.

I respectfully request your favorable action on S.1658. Thank you for your time and attention to the Wakpa Sica Project, "The Reconciliation Place" and Sioux Nation Supreme Court.

Respectfully Submitted,

Webster Two Hawk  
Commissioner